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SUBJECT: VATICAN: VENEZUELAN FETE CARDINAL UROSA

REF: VATICAN 37 ET AL.

CLASSIFIED BY: Peter Martin, Pol/Econ Chief, Vatican, State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[¶](#)1. (C) The Venezuelan Embassy to the Holy See wasted no time in cozying up to freshly-minted Cardinal Jorge Urosa, organizing a mass at which he presided in the aftermath of the March 24 consistory. Holy See Country Director for Venezuela Nicolas Thevenin told us the turnout for the mass was good, but noted the absence of the rector of the residence for Venezuelan seminarians here, Fr. Pedro Freitas. Fr. Freitas made the headlines last year with harsh criticism of the Chavez regime. Thevenin did not know if Freitas had not been invited to the mass, or was boycotting due to the Venezuelan embassy's participation in the event.

[¶](#)2. (C) Embassy participation in an event of this sort is not unusual; other "Catholic countries" with new cardinals have organized similar services. But Thevenin was wary of Venezuelan diplomats exerting nefarious influence here. He told us he had heard of attempts to "politicize" young Venezuelan seminarians studying in Rome, adding that there were even rumors of payments to buy their allegiance for Chavez.

[¶](#)3. (C) Meanwhile, Urosa seemed much at home in his new garb, welcoming well-wishers from several countries in Spanish and English at a Vatican-sponsored reception open to the public on March 24.

ROONEY